

THE ROAD LESS REWARDED

AS PROFESSIONS BECOME FEMALE-DOMINATED, STATUS AND PAY SEEM TO SLIP. NOW RESEARCHERS ARE ASKING WHY—AND TURNING UP SOME SURPRISING CONCLUSIONS.

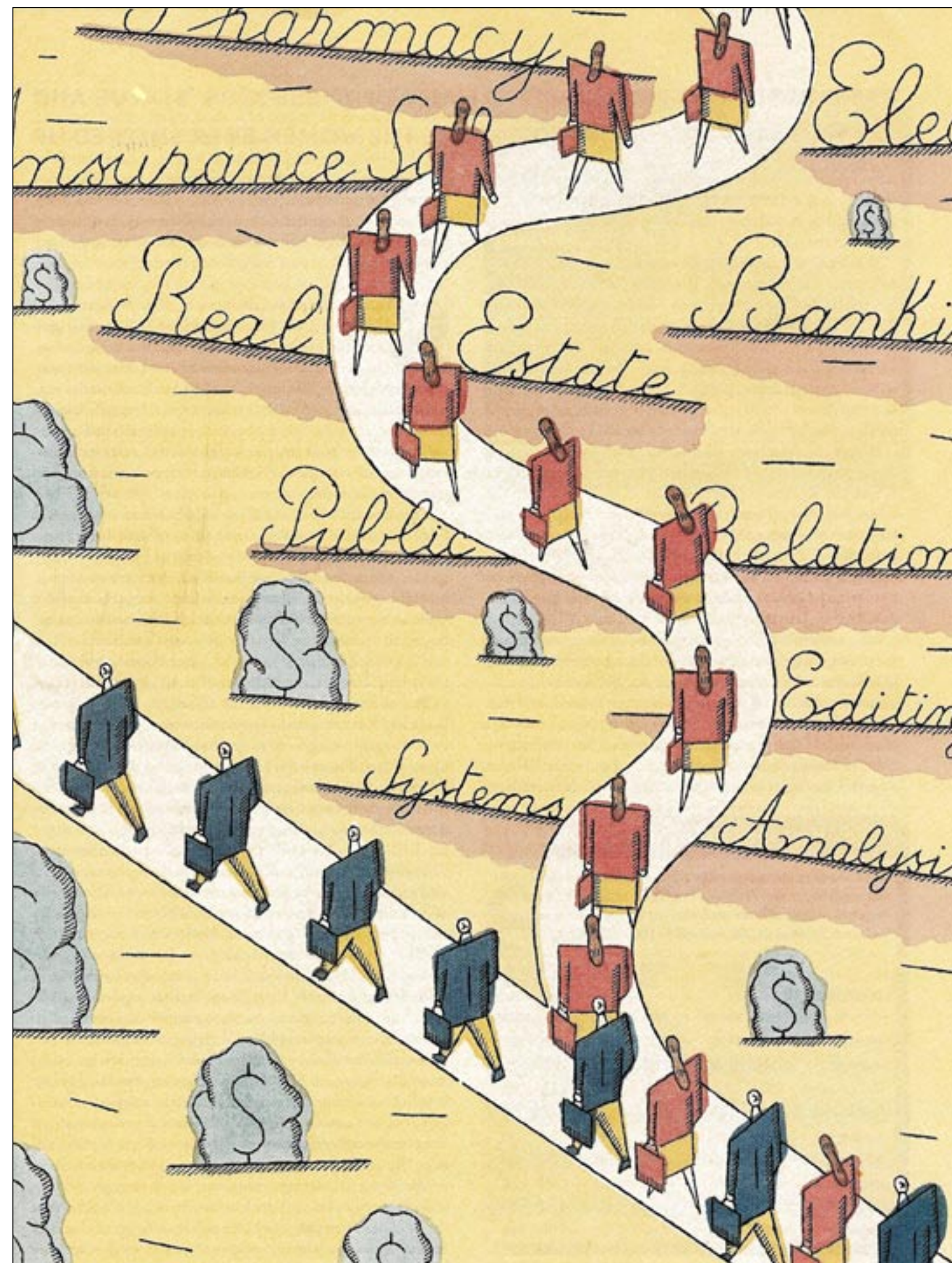
BY BROOKE KROEGER



BACK IN THE EARLY 1980s, A United Press International vice president named Eugene Blabey liked to brag about his "All-Girl Orchestra"—the editorial management team he had assembled for the company's Europe-Africa-Middle East division. The chief editor, based at headquarters in London, was a woman; so were the bureau managers in the world capitals: London, Paris, Madrid, Rome, Vienna, Warsaw and Tel Aviv. Few, if any, male-dominated U.S. companies could boast such a progressive management roster in its prestige posts. But UPI was near financial collapse at the time, paying the poorest salaries of all the major news organizations, offering the least attractive overseas benefits package and, of course, guaranteeing no job security.

The company's dismal financial situation may have deterred top male journalists from working there, but not some equally talented women, who were far hungrier for professional recognition than for long-term stability. When asked about his reasoning, Blabey puts it bluntly: "It made economic sense. At UPI, we were always constrained by an inability to pay a lot because we didn't have a lot. By hiring women, you could get a lot better talent for the money by taking advantage of the fact that women are discriminated against."

Journalism is only one of a growing group of occupations in which women have become an unmistakable presence over the past 25 years, rising from 20% of U.S. journalists in 1971 to 34% in 1992, according to an Indiana University study. In accounting, about



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30% of professionals are now women; in law, 20%. In still other fields, such as book editing, public relations and insurance adjusting, the inroads have been so complete that women now dominate the ranks.

What makes some fields open up to women and others not? And in those that have been "feminized," what has the impact been on the profession as a whole—and on the women in particular? The assumption was always that the prevalence of women in the workplace somehow poisoned the pool, causing earning levels and prestige to drop—partly because women were cheaper labor, partly because of trade-offs such as maternity leave and flextime, or simply because women with families couldn't work until 10 PM or on weekends.

Wrong. Research now shows that in many of these jobs, the opposite occurred: Status and pay had already dropped before the women ever showed up. In other occupations, where prestige and pay scales have held, women gained entry when the fields expanded—mostly in the '80s. Too often, however, they still found themselves in inhospitable corporate cultures, stuck in what has been called the velvet ghetto of lower-status jobs or unable to advance because long-established men were simply too well entrenched.

Now leaders in several professions are studying ways to keep the prestige and pay scale up as their fields become increasingly feminized. The American Psychological Association, for instance, created a task force in 1991 to study the issue and make recommendations for action. In November, it is sponsoring a roundtable, "Changing Gender Composition," in Washington, D.C., so various professions can pool data and ideas. "We had to get the message out there that women were not the cause of

the decline in prestige and economic status, for one thing," says Dorothy Cantor, who heads the APA's gender-shift task force. "For another, the situation in which the number of 'worker bees' in psychology became increasingly female while the leadership did not could not be allowed to persist."

SOCIOLOGISTS BARBARA RESKIN, NOW AT OHIO STATE University, and Patricia Roos of Rutgers first analyzed this changeover in their 1990 book, *Job Queues, Gender Queues*. They studied labor tables and statistics from 1970 to 1988 and wrote and edited case studies in 11 once-male-dominated fields that had become feminized during those years: book editing, pharmacy, public relations, bank management, systems analysis, insurance sales, real estate sales, insurance adjusting and examining, bartending, baking, and typesetting and composition.

They then laid out a theoretical model based on what they call "dual queues"—a job's attractiveness to potential employees measured against an employer's perception of a prospective worker's attractiveness. Qualified white men have traditionally led the queue as the most desirable hires in this country. But when an occupation, or a given position within an occupation, ceases to attract them because its status has deteriorated, employers look further down the labor queue for the "next-best" alternative. Hence Gene Blabey and his All-Girl Orchestra.

The number of women in the 11 occupations studied by Roos and Reskin rose disproportionately to the number of women in the work force in general only after earnings and upward mobility in each of the fields had declined. That is, salaries had gone down, prestige had diminished or—as with the move from "hot type" to keyboard electronic composition—technological changes had caused the job to become too much like "women's work" for men to want to do it anymore. Therefore, in Reskin and Roos's estimation, the success of women has been "in large measure hollow," especially in terms of economic gains. As they say in their book, "Women get a ticket to ride after the gravy train has left the station."

All the same, no one would say that women haven't advanced. "Clearly, there are indications that women have made dramatic inroads," says Roos. And it is important to factor in the impact of the women's movement and governmental antidiscrimination policies in giving women a boost. But Reskin thinks that since 1970, there have been steps backward as well as forward. She cites the shrinkage in the pay gap between women and men, often held up as a sign of women's progress, as a case in point. "We've seen the gap narrow by a dime on the dollar [in the past decade]—a penny a year," she says. "But at the same time, men's real wages have been falling. So the pay gap shrinking is not doing anyone any good."

In the occupations in which women have advanced because the field has expanded, they face subtler sources of discrimination, usually segregation within a field. Even in veterinary

THE '70s: THE BIG-SWITCH DECADE

When changing technology and declining wages made certain jobs less appealing to men, employers turned to women. The wage gap narrowed in most of these positions, but primarily because men's real earnings dropped. (All amounts in 1969 dollars.)

OCCUPATIONS	MEAN ANNUAL EARNINGS 1969		MEAN ANNUAL EARNINGS 1979		CHANGE IN REAL EARNINGS 1969-79	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
All Occupations	\$9,580	\$4,944	\$10,071	\$5,581	\$491	\$637
Pharmacists	13,475	7,897	12,058	8,675	-1,417	778
Editors, Reporters	12,830	7,151	10,968	7,445	-1,862	294
Public Relations	13,420	7,908	12,683	7,672	-737	-236
Insurance Sales	12,430	6,308	13,378	6,396	948	88
Real Estate Sales	13,749	7,401	13,398	8,166	-351	765
Insurance Adjusters	9,898	5,820	9,381	5,587	-517	-233
Bartenders	6,787	4,122	5,730	3,830	-1,057	-292
Bus Drivers	7,667	3,477	8,308	4,895	441	1,418

Source: Job Queues, Gender Queues

medicine, Roos says, women tend to care for the small animals and men for the larger ones. The bigger the beast, the larger the potential earnings. Women in corporations tend to congregate in staff positions, such as human resources and community relations, that don't lead anywhere. These jobs may offer more flexibility and more predictable hours than line positions, but they usually provide no hard criteria for measuring performance, productivity or profits—and, therefore, no defined route to the top.

A 1990 survey of women in corporate management in Fortune 500 companies, done by the New York-based research organization Catalyst, found that women may be moving into management at a rapid rate, but they're not advancing at a rate proportionate to their numbers in the ranks. Twenty-five years ago, women made up 15% of management in American corporations. Today, Catalyst reports, women represent one-fourth to one-half of entry-level and middle management in Fortune 500 companies, but still only about 5% of senior management.

One reason for that, says Mary Mattis, Catalyst's vice president of research, is the corporate culture—still a barrier for women, especially in professional firms and partnerships; after all, the partners have the freedom to make their own rules. "The culture and psychology of [these] organizations derives from an era of single-family earners, where two people supported one career," Mattis explains. "That's how you can ask someone to work 80 hours a week. Now you've got a culture of diversity in the employee base, and life doesn't change much when you make partner."

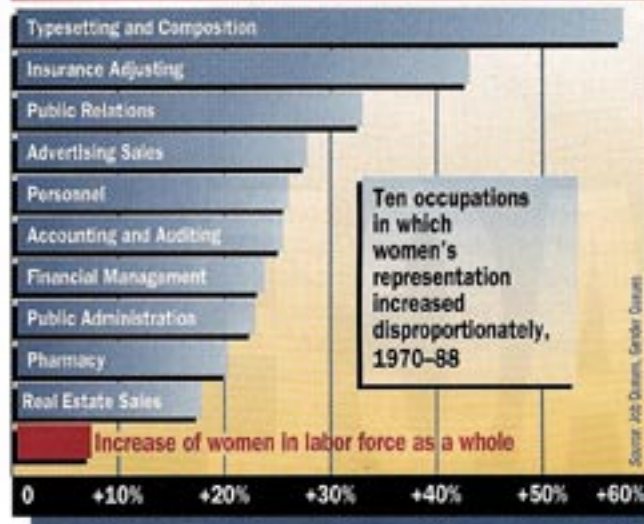
There is also a generational problem. Roos recently completed a study of the situation in her own field, sociology, where, although the recruitment pool is now half men, half women, only 27% of women sociologists are working in academia—the most prestigious, if not the best-paying, sector of the field. She found that the men who hold the majority of these most sought-after jobs don't relinquish them until they retire or die, leaving few openings for the growing percentage of capable women with doctorates.

Janice Johnson, 40, a director at the accounting firm Coopers & Lybrand, points to a similar situation in her field. When she joined Peat Marwick 17 years ago, a third of the entering class of CPAs was female, "and that's nowhere near the leadership at this point," she says.

Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, author of the seminal 1983 study *Women in Law*, says many of the old patterns are difficult to change, even though women now make up 42% of entering law-school students and 20% of the profession—a reasonable showing, she says, considering how long men have dominated the field. However, she claims that there is still resistance to women lawyers and that new patterns have developed to replace outlawed ones. For example, while women have now found positions in all areas in the largest and most prestigious firms, on average they still tend to cluster in lower-paying specialties, such as family law and government work. This also holds true for minority women and men, who show the lowest percentage of employment in private practice.

"But the differences have been diminishing," Epstein says.

MORE WOMEN ON THE JOB



Citing the expansion of law as the primary reason for women's gaining acceptance, Epstein notes that "women have entrée into spheres where they could never find work before," like litigation and corporate law. Johnson sees similar patterns emerging in accounting, due to both expansion of the field and women's performance. "Women are making partner at a much faster rate than they were seven or eight years ago," she says. "You look at the list and there is a much bigger percentage of women."

Heidi Hartmann of the Institute for Women's Policy Research has been conducting a management survey for the Labor Department's Glass Ceiling Commission. It shows that women are progressing in management across all fields faster than men. For instance, using the Current Population Survey public-use tables, Hartmann has shown that between 1982 and 1992 the yearly growth rate for all managers was about 3.4%, but the number of white women managers increased at an annual rate of 6.2%, versus just 1.4% annually for white men.

STILL, LYNN BURBRIDGE OF THE WELLESLEY COLLEGE Center for Research on Women has found that 30% of white executive and managerial women work for the lower-paying government or nonprofit sector, as do 50% of African-American women. Close to 83% of all professional white women work for government or nonprofit organizations, as do almost 90% of African-American professional women, according to the 1990 census. The most depressing finding in Burbridge's study was what these 1990 census figures represent in terms of income: In government, female professionals earn \$19,400 to \$28,300 a year on average; female managers earn \$25,000 to \$26,500. Just to put these figures in context, Burbridge threw in the fact that the average salary for a skilled blue-collar worker in government, according to the 1990 census, is \$26,000 a year—at the high end of women's average professional and managerial earnings.

Beyond pay obstacles, problems in feminized occupations are receding, but slowly. Johnson (Continued on page 82)

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(Continued from page 53) thinks the hostility toward women that she experienced in her early years in accounting has subsided, as has the reliance on stereotypes. But she thinks this is due more to the open attitudes and experiences of the younger generation of men in the field—many of whom have working wives and young children—than to the growing presence of women.

Cynthia Epstein says that although women have made inroads into the more prestigious areas of law, the lifestyle issues still loom. "Women's responsibilities as mothers have some impact on the way they experience choice," she says, "and probably a greater percentage leave high-demand work because they also have obligations at home. Firms have some policies in place that represent an improvement over the past, but they're still not family-friendly."

In other words, women have changed but the companies haven't. A good example is book editing, one of the 11 occupa-

tions studied by Roos and Reskin. The field became feminized early on as salary levels stagnated and prestige declined in the early 1960s. By the 1980s, women represented fully two-thirds of the industry work force, and today it would be unusual to hear a woman editor speak of being discriminated against on the basis of her sex. Joni Evans, a literary agent who was an editor and publisher for many years, dismisses any notion of a barrier to women's advancement in the field. "Editing is a place where there is not a hierarchy," she says. "But there is a report-card effect: Books sell and you're a star."

Overall, the industry seems to provide an atmosphere of openness to women. Betsy Rapoport, for example, is a senior editor at Times Books. At 35, with two children under age 5, she works in the office Monday through Wednesday and at home on Thursday and Friday. "I have phone, fax and Fed Ex, and it keeps me in very close touch," she says. "It works, if you're getting the job done."

Yet Rapoport is not aware of more than a couple of editors throughout the

field with an on-staff flextime arrangement like her own. And even though there seem to be as many female senior editors and publishers as male, why is it that among the seven major trade-publishing houses, only one, the Putnam Berkley Group, can claim a woman—Phyllis Grann—who rose through the editorial ranks to become chief executive officer? Probable answer: Too many men still clogging that very-well-paid queue.

AMONG PROFESSIONALS THEMSELVES, psychologists have taken the most preemptive action, commissioning a lengthy study of the phenomenon of feminization in their field and then asking what can be done to ensure the field's attractiveness in the future. The study found that while women received 61.2% of all psychology doctorates in 1991 (up from 24.7% in 1971), they are significantly underrepresented in such prestigious areas as academia. "Men are still training the women," says the APA's Cantor. Also, women still make less than men: They earned 86.4% of men's pay

in 1989, down from 87.5% in 1973.

Cantor says it would be "unrealistic and grandiose" to think that a gender-shift task force could simply reverse the negative trends in the field. All the same, some steps can be taken: seeking more women for leadership roles and making sure that what is taught in the psychology curriculum includes research into such pressing women's issues as the psychological impact on women of balancing career and family. Cantor says the APA's committee also recommended getting the word out that women aren't to blame for the changing status of the field and that professions in which women play a major part should command more respect. Women, she reasons, have to be encouraged to become their own public advocates, fighting for public policies that are friendlier, with a focus on issues that really tap into their needs. "What I mean," Cantor says, "is not just a general mental-health agenda, but a women's mental-health agenda—the mental-health equivalent of breast-cancer research for women."

As an example of actions being taken,

Cantor cites the recent reiteration by the APA's Council of Representatives of a policy requiring internship sites, such as hospitals and community mental-health centers, to get serious about offering half-time as well as full-time internships to accommodate working mothers (as well as working fathers)—allowing more women to get their training while also being available to their families.

More important, she says, women need to be "prompting and encouraging" other women to get them involved actively in the advocacy process. "Women wait to be invited—tapped on the shoulder and asked to be designated," Cantor sighs. "If we expect more women to be in the system, then the women already there have to invite others in, because women are less likely to do so independently."

As for what's to be avoided, Cantor recounts what Roos and Reskin found when they looked into what happened in banking after women swelled the employee ranks. As soon as bank telling switched from a male to a female occupation, the entry route it had once represented to the

executive office shut down. Cantor hypothesizes that if women had been less passive about accepting that change, if they had asserted their right to be promoted as the men before them had been, it might have made a difference.

All of this raises a question: When women gain a substantial foothold in a profession, where do the men go? "It is not necessarily the case that men leave the field," explains Roos. "It's that they no longer choose to enter it." As jobs become feminized, older males drop out through attrition and younger males look elsewhere. "It's no longer a men's club," says Roos. Even in positions in which women are given an opportunity to climb the ladder, there is a price to pay. "Executives have to get the best talent they can afford," says Gene Blabey. "Anyone would give a first-rate woman a job over a second-rate man." But what about a first-rate salary to go with it? ■

Brooke Kroeger, a New York journalist, is the author of *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist*.

